

Chairs
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December 27a

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Curios and Relics

Furniture

Chairs

Rocking Chair –

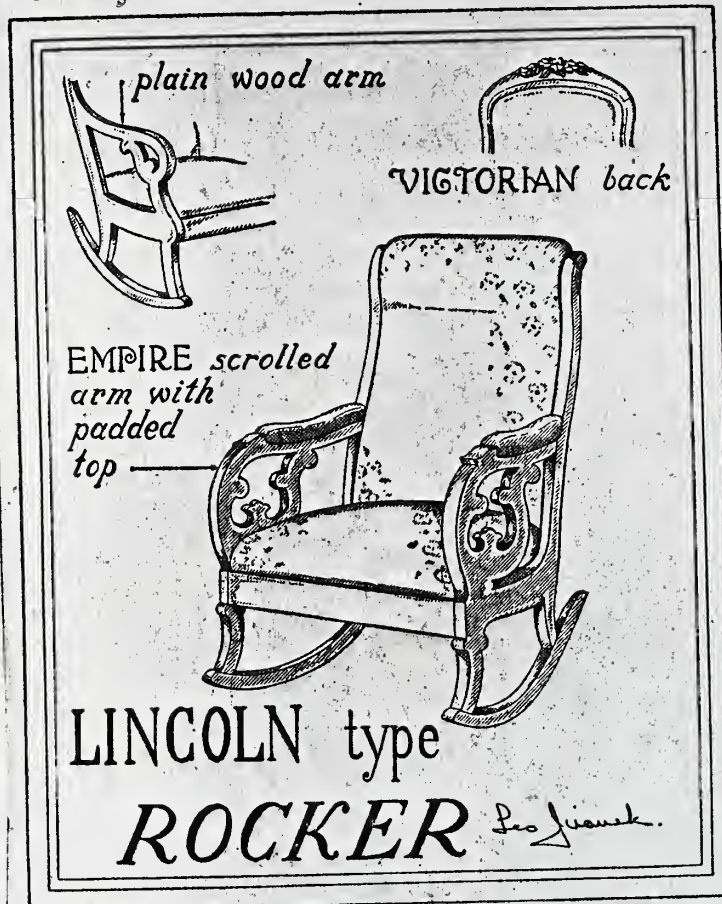
Ford's Theatre

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

THE BOSTON SUNDAY

Know Furniture 2/8/42



LINCOLN type ROCKER Leo Jiranek.

By LEO JIRANEK

Although Benjamin Franklin is accredited with having put two curved runners on one of his arm chairs and thus inventing the rocking chair, this American innovation did not become popular until after 1800. Several unique types were evolved that are being reproduced today, the most popular of which is probably the one known as the Lincoln Rocker.

In appearance this rocker is like a thousand other Victorian or Empire chairs made in the period between 1837 and 1901. Its elaborately scrolled arms with padded tops and its high back make it very comfortable to sit in. Large and roomy, it was made of black walnut and covered in a printed silk damask. The story of how this particular chair came to be known as the Lincoln Rocker is interesting.

The night of April 14, 1865 was a gala occasion. Richmond had fallen and the President of the United States with his party were to attend the theatre and witness Laura Keane's performance of "Our American Cousin." A rocking chair that had belonged to one of the stage settings was placed in the Presidential box for Mr. Lincoln's personal use and he was enjoying its comfort when the unexpected attack upon him was made. The authenticity of this particular chair is

proved by research among contemporary records, primarily the testimony elicited at the trial of his conspirators. The Lincoln Rocker is now preserved in the National Museum in Washington, D. C.

In the 19th century, there were many variations made of rockers similar to the one shown above. Some had plain wooden arms without upholstered tops and the variations of the scroll designs were many. The backs were varied too, some had continuous wood frames with plain or Victorian carved tops, others were upholstered on over without any top rail showing. These rockers were sturdily built of solid walnut, mahogany or maple and many are still in use today.

For a while, rocking chairs were considered old-fashioned and relegated to the attics, but in recent years have been rediscovered and are now popular in our homes once more. There are many reproductions of the Lincoln Rocker available today which blend harmoniously with our Colonial and 18th century settings. We are glad for this American institution, without which, no homey living room would really be comfortable.

If there are any questions the readers would like to ask about the Lincoln Rocker, write to Leo Jiranek in care of this paper, enclosing a self-addressed, three-cent stamped envelope.

The Louisville Times
Louisville, Kentucky
February 12, 1963

STROLLING With Floyd Edwards

Abe Was A Rocker Man, Too

Chair brought Lincoln comfort;
it turned out to be fatal seat



Floyd Edwards

Rocking chairs have been popular in Washington long before John F. Kennedy became President.

Some were more massive and ornate a century ago than the simple rocker Kennedy brought to the White House, but the idea of rocking comfort was the same.

Abraham Lincoln liked rockers. They seemed to make him more comfortable, because of his long legs. One that he used is pictured here.

This red-upholstered job is the one in which he was seated in the theater box when he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865. Draped over an arm is the shawl he wore on that fateful evening, and on it lies the play bill.

The chair is now in the Ford Museum of Greenfield Village at Dearborn, Mich., from where this picture was brought by O. C. Cox (3512 Gladden), well-known history buff.



Lincoln's chair at theater

Back to the Seat of the Crime

By Nan Barnhouse, Home Furnishings Editor

HIGH POINT, N.C.—In a showroom here of Victorian furniture is a rocking chair of historical significance that seems to be making a new history of its own.

The chair is a replica of the one in which President Abraham Lincoln sat at Ford's Theatre in Washington, when he was shot by John Wilkes Booth, April 14, 1865.

The Carlton McLendon Furniture Company of Montgomery, Ala., was commissioned by U.S. Department of Interior to duplicate furniture for use in the re-opened theater.

THE FIRST public opening of the restored theater was Feb. 12 this year, the birthdate, of course, of the assassinated 16th president.

Carlton McLendon, founder of the company which bears his name, gently fingered the duplicate chair in his showroom at the Southern Furniture Exposition Building. He talked about his emotions during the making of the chair.

"At first I had a feeling I was commemorating a mur-

der. I had an eerie, gruesome feeling about it.

"In fact," he continued, "I wasn't even interested in producing it. I just bundled up all the papers and specifications from the government and sent them right back. There was a bundle about an inch thick."

INCLUDED were photographs of the scene taken by Matthew Brady the morning after the shooting. The chair was shown clearly, he said.

The theater chair in which

the president actually sat is in the Henry Ford Museum at Greenfield Village, Mich., and was not available as a working model, McLendon said.

"We discovered, however, that we had a chair just like it in our own home. It had been part of some property in Natchez that my wife inherited."

Then there were more government contacts, McLendon said, and he began to realize the historical importance of the restoration project. Eventually, he even offered to make it free.

"**I OFFERED** to make it as a gesture for my government, but they couldn't accept it that way," he said. A token charge was made.

McLendon duplicated the Lincoln rocker as well as the Mary Todd Lincoln chair, small straight chair, used by the President's wife. He also made 36 reproductions of Mrs. Lincoln's chair for other boxes in the theater.

In addition to the Lincoln chairs, the restored presidential box holds McLendon reproductions of a chair occupied by a bodyguard, another that held a guest and a restored original sofa.

A small private reception was held at the theater before the official opening in February. McLendon recalled his feelings that night.

"**MY feelings** changed entirely from the first. I didn't have a gruesome feeling at all when I walked into the theater and saw what a beautiful thing it is."

He continued, "It was alive, and today it is just as pretty as anything I've ever seen."

The response that McLendon's company has had from persons wanting to buy copies of the chairs has astounded him. He is learning just how many Lincoln admirers there are.

Originally the company did not plan to put the chair on the market, McLendon said, but letters from interested persons have changed that. The reproductions can now be ordered.

THE DAY the President's chair was finished wasn't a special day at the time. "I

just sat down in the chair and said 'We're through'" McLendon recalled. "One of the fellows snapped my picture in the chair and that was that."

McLendon is proud of his furniture factory, which he started with his brother Raymond in 1933. Now 55 years old and the head of the firm, he said, "Last year we made 18,000 chairs and had only 26 complaints. Those cost us less than \$500 to settle."

McLendon was an industrial arts teacher at Sidney Lanier High School in Montgomery, Ala. and furniture-making was his hobby. "I started making a piece for the principal, then the football coach, and then other teachers. Soon people began coming to us to make things for them. I quit teaching school," McLendon said.

McLENDON'S Lincoln chair in Washington is made of walnut just as the original was. He is making the current reproductions in mahogany, however, because walnut is so expensive. The chair, in mahogany with facsimile red brocade uphol-

Decorating



This reproduction of President Lincoln's chair was crafted by the Carlton McLendon Furniture Co. and is an authentic reproduction of the original.



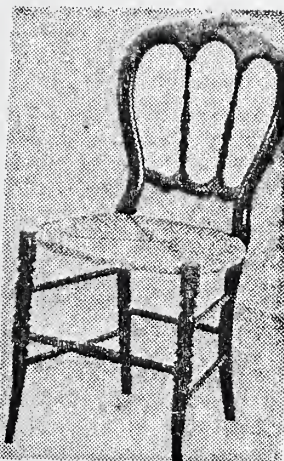
This view of the restored presidential box in Ford's Theatre in Washington is from where John Wilkes Booth stood as he shot President Abraham Lincoln.

stery retails for around \$225. The Mary Todd Lincoln chair, in Tupelo wood painted ebony, is around \$100, he said.

The fabric on the Ford's theatre chairs was reproduced from the study of an original piece of cloth and was made at \$100 a yard by Scalamandre Silk Co.

McLendon made only three president's chairs from the original walnut cutting. The most important one may be seen in Ford's Theatre. The ones with perhaps even more sentimental value are for McLendon's two grandsons, Grady Sebastian Clinkscales, III, 6, and Carlton McLendon Clinkscales, 4.

The doting grandfather said "I've put those chairs up until the boys are grown and have their own families."



The Mary Todd Lincoln chair, a reproduction made especially for the reopened Ford's Theatre. Both the President's rocker and this chair are available commercially.

The Lincoln Chair

**AN EXACT REPRODUCTION
OF THE CHAIR IN WHICH
LINCOLN WAS SHOT
AVAILABLE NOW TO
CIVIL WAR TIMES *Illustrated*
SUBSCRIBERS**



The appearance of Abraham Lincoln at performances in Ford's Theatre in Washington was not entirely unusual. He had seen eight of the 495 plays presented there since the Fords opened their rebuilt theatre in August of 1863. But his attendance on April 14, 1865 was to be a special one and there was to be a new "state box." The Fords felt doubly honored on that Good Friday because not only had Lincoln accepted their invitation over one extended by Washington's other major theatre, Grover's, but it was also thought that he would bring U. S. Grant who, just five days earlier, had accepted Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

Special attention was given to the preparation of the "state box" at Ford's. A partition was removed to combine two boxes into one large one. A gilt-framed engraving of George Washington was hung on a central pillar and two American flags flanked the enlarged box while another was draped over the balustrade. As a final touch, Harry Ford brought a walnut rocker from his own apartment. This was the chair in which Lincoln was sitting when he was shot, the chair that, later, Mathew Brady, with his uncanny sense of what history would want to know, carefully photographed.

When the restoration of the Ford's Theatre was undertaken in 1968, The Carlton McLendon Furniture Company was selected to make an exact reproduction of the chair. Through special arrangements, with this company, we are now able to offer this same chair, an exact reproduction of the chair now on display in Ford's Theatre, to our CWTI subscribers. The chair is handsomely carved and reproduced in mahogany. It is a remarkably comfortable chair, 42½ inches high,

39 inches deep and 23 inches wide. While the original chair was covered in red, we are offering it in your choice of three colors of antique velvet. (Sorry, but we cannot provide color swatches.) You may select a rich, deep red; a mellow antique gold or a light olive green. Because of our special arrangements with the maker we are able to offer it to our CWTI subscribers, covered in the antique velvet of their selection, for only \$195.00. You may order your Lincoln chair by sending in your request along with your selection of color and your \$50 down payment to: CIVIL WAR TIMES *Illustrated*, 206 Hanover Street, Gettysburg, Penna. 17325. You will be billed for the balance of the cost at the time your chair is shipped. Since each chair will be individually assembled and covered, please allow six to ten weeks for delivery.

Please reserve in my name a replica of The Lincoln Rocker. My deposit of \$50 is enclosed.

Name _____
(please print)

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Indicate color of fabric you prefer:

☐ red ☐ antique gold ☐ olive green

Signed _____

Note: Pennsylvania residents must pay 6% sales tax.

K AUSLER

428 Bradford Avenue
Webster Groves, Mo.
63119
August 13, 1969

Mr. R. Gerald McMurtry
The Lincoln National Life Foundation
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Mr. McMurtry,

It was with interest that I visited the Henry Ford Museum in Greenfield Village this last August 9, as I remembered that it had in its collection the walnut rocker in which Lincoln sat the night of his assassination. Thus I entered with particular thought to find this chair, as I have been a Lincoln student for many years. I found it displayed as part of a "Museum Treasures" display. It had no label, no explanation of its historical significance so that the casual looker would know its value. I understood, on reaching the circuit courthouse on display in the village itself that it is normally displayed there. The museum literature I received made no special mention of the piece, but I did find a particularly misleading postcard of the chair. This shows the grisly relic so attractively displayed that I see no possible manner in which one could complain, if it were in reality thus exhibited. I have taken the liberty to enclose a copy of this card.

Faced with the chair's apparent disconnection with everything else in the museum, its use only as a cheap merchandising trick, leads me to question: How did this rocker come to be in a private collection charging a rather high admission when, as late as April 22, 1929, as reported in Lincoln Lore No. 2, it was "stored away in the basement of the Smithsonian Institution," presumably public property? In the Historic Structures Report on the Ford's Theatre restoration it is mentioned as a piece that would be obtained (page 103). If this is all the better use made of it, I see no reason for the chair's absence from Washington. I would appreciate it if you could direct me to a source for information, or, if convenient, tell me how this situation came to be.

I have one more request to make of you, as editor of one of my favorite Lincoln sources. Having received your bulletin only since number 1541, I have tried to use a photographic copier to secure other issues. Would it be possible to sell or give copies earlier than this to supplement my collection? If so, I would be heavily in your debt, even as I now am for taking so much of your valuable time.

Yours gratefully,

Kurt M. Kausler

Kurt M. Kausler

August 21, 1969

Mr. Kurt M. Kausler
428 Bradford Avenue
Webster Grove, Missouri 63119

Dear Mr. Kausler:

I have your letter of August 13th. I have seen the Lincoln assassination rocking chair many times in the Logan County Court House in Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan.

This chair was the personal property of the Ford (theatre) family. It was taken from their home and placed in the box for Lincoln's comfort. After the assassination the government sized the theatre and all the equipment. Later they purchased the building. They held all ~~itmes~~ associated with the assassination. Years later Henry Ford's buyers insisted that the government had no right to this piece of personal property. The government released the chair to the Ford (theatre) family and they sold it to Henry Ford (no relation).

It has always been my opinion that Henry Ford II would release this chair back to the government if a high Federal official would approach him on the matter. The bureaucratic officials who would like to get the chair back are not experts in public relations.

I will send you some back issues of LINCOLN LORE under separate cover. At the present time back numbers are very difficult to obtain.

Yours sincerely,

R. Gerald McMurtry

RGM/cvrw

Enclosure: Under separate cover

August 7, 1982

Dear Mr. Neely,

Many thanks for your generous reply to my request concerning the Lincoln chair at the Buggy Wheel Antiques shop. We were glad to hear there is a connection between the Pullman family and the Lincoln family. I am going to write to the Chicago Historical Society for further inquiry. Mr. Jahnke has taken two pictures of the rocker which I will enclose with my letter. I would also like to send a copy of the letter you wrote to me on July 19th. We are highly interested in securing the source of this furniture. I will keep you posted if anything unusual should come of this. I hope you receive word soon on your Champaign speech--I will be anxious to secure a copy when it is published. Sincerely yours,

Mary C. Zimmer

M. ZIMMER
Vergas Apts. #4
Vergas
Minn. 56587



Mr. Mark E. Neely, Jr.
Lincoln Library and Museum
1300 South Clinton Street
Fort Wayne
Indiana 46801

Handwritten in red ink:
Jared

Copies also filed in ASSASSINATION drawer &
ASSASSINATION & FUNERAL-RELICS drawer

18 — Tri-State Trader — August 21, 1982

LINCOLN ROCKER

The red silk damask-covered rocking chair in which Abraham Lincoln was seated when he was assassinated is now on display at Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich. Lincoln was watching the play "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre in Washington when he was shot on April 14, 1865.

EXHIBIT ITEM

Item No.	1.50/A
Artist	
Medium	
Title of Work	1890's reproduction of rocking chair from Ford's Theatre
Dimensions	42"H x 23.5"W x 34"D
Exh Sec	1
Case/Wall #:	Case 05
Institution	The Lincoln Museum

Photo



Ref #.

Label A "Lincoln Rocker"

Reproductions of the rocking chair in which Lincoln was shot became popular in the late nineteenth century. Henry Ford obtained the original for his museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

Lincoln rocker reproduction, 1890s.
(The Lincoln Museum)

now at ACPL

